

AFTER years of fruitless talks between Wycombe Wanderers Football Club and Oxford Regional Hospital Board it is almost certain that the club will now agree to sell its Loakes Park ground at High Wycombe to the board.

Expert view

The board wants the football ground so that it can build big extensions to the adjoining Wycombe Hospital on it. At present the hospital buildings are along two sides of the ground, which is about six acres in extent.

The board has pointed out that if it cannot extend the hospital over Loakes Park it will be forced to build another hospital outside the town, splitting the hospital services of the area, resulting in additional capital expenditure and running costs, and duplicating some staff.

It is understood that agreement of the club to give up the ground—its home since early in the century and the gift of Mr. Frank Adams—depends on a suitable ground being available elsewhere and on the board paying a reasonable price for the land.

And that price would probably be not less than £1,000,000, for in addition to the market price of the land at Loakes Park—and that would be in the region of £500,000 as building land—the club would expect enough money to provide proper facilities on its new ground.

The plan

They would include a spacious stand, which would probably cost more than £200,000, committee room and other amenities, and extensive terracing.

During talks with local planning authorities the club has indicated that it would need a level site of from 15 to 20 acres.

And it has in fact now submitted an outline planning application for siting the football ground on extensive area of land at Terriers, on the east side of the road which leads from Wellesbourne School to Four Ashes.

This is being considered by the planning committee of Wycombe Rural Council, which is likely to make a decision in the next few weeks.

The application was made after technical officers of the council had met to consider whether or not the hospital's requirements should be met at Loakes Park or sited elsewhere.

They reported that because of the capital already invested at the hospital, and the high additional capital needed for a second site, the hospital would have to be developed on its present site if a properly balanced and fully comprehensive district hospital service was to be provided.

But they accepted that the football club was an important asset to the town, and that it was essential that satisfactory alternative accommodation should be offered to it.

In favour?

It was at the technical officers' suggestion that the club applied for planning consent for the Terriers site, which is extensive and level.

Though club officials are reluctant to comment on the matter it is understood that most of them favour a move to Terriers.

Their argument, in addition to helping the hospital to expand efficiently and economically, is that the club should look to the future—that it will be able to provide more modern facilities for its fans on a spacious ground at Terriers.

They contend that sooner or later the famous slope of the pitch at Loakes Park will have to be levelled—it is a source of complaint from some visiting

sides—and that this would be costly and put the terraces and the ground furniture out of proportion, adding to the cost.

Suitable

The Terriers site is level, has good road communications with the surrounding area, can be developed with fine modern amenities for fans, and provide extensive car parking space, they say.

They also point out that there is a shift of population from the town centre, where houses are being pulled down and factories and offices built, to the north of High Wycombe.

And they have in mind plans of a consortium to build 2,200 houses on nearby land between Four Ashes and Hazlemere, and the county council plan to build a new major road from Hazlemere to Hughenden Road, High Wycombe, and

which would run near the Terriers site.

Pointer

The move to Terriers, if agreement is reached with the hospital board and the club's plans approved, would not take place for perhaps four or five years.

The board is not immediately ready to start building extensions to the hospital, but it needs to know whether the Loakes Park site will be available so that it can plan ahead.

A pointer to the probable agreement of the club to sell Loakes Park to the hospital is that it recently shelved plans to build a new clubhouse on the ground.